



Finding yourself in the middle of nowhere

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Bill Priedhorsky, program director of Laboratory-Directed Research & Development at the Laboratory, has been walking for several hours. He leans on a hiking pole and takes in his desert surroundings. There are no tension wires, trails or even signs of wildlife here. Like many times before, Priedhorsky finds himself in the middle of nowhere.

“For me, the outdoors amounts to one big puzzle,” Priedhorsky explains. “It’s about exploring, finding new places and being surprised by things I never knew were there.”

Although many who indulge in the outdoors do it for sport or challenge, Bill takes a more contemplative approach to his exploration. “It’s humbling, finding yourself in the middle of nowhere,” Priedhorsky says. “You really internalize what a big world we live in and just how little each one of us is. I’m really inspired by such things, so I just keep going back and back. Exploration is not what I do—it’s who I am.”

Hiking the Wonderland Trail

Aside from brief excursions as a Boy Scout, Priedhorsky really did not give much thought to the outdoors until, fresh out of high school, he connected with an old buddy, who asked if he wanted to circumnavigate Mount Rainier, the highest mountain in the state of Washington.

“So, my buddy and I set out to walk what is known as the Wonderland Trail, a 93-mile trek around the mountain, in the days before you needed a permit,” Priedhorsky says. “We backpacked through about two-thirds of it before my friend’s knee gave out. But the challenge is what stuck with me, and it sticks with me to this day.”

While attending graduate school, Priedhorsky’s interest in the outdoors led him to the mountains. On most weekends, he and his friends would ascend the mountains that overlook Southern California, hiking every weekend in the San Gabriels and beyond.

When Priedhorsky came to Los Alamos in 1978, he soon discovered the Los Alamos Mountaineers, a club founded in 1952. It was in this 200-member organization that Priedhorsky’s penchant for exploration grew even more.

Since 1979, Priedhorsky has led more than 80 expeditions into the canyon country of northeast Arizona and southeast Utah. Many early expeditions were spartan backpacking affairs, but recent trips are easier, with the groups hiring horses or llamas to carry loads to a base camp that offers limited luxuries (like chairs) and fresh food. He

has held various positions within the club, including trip coordinator and five terms as president.

“Going out and exploring the outdoors brings people together,” says Priedhorsky. “You really connect with people when you spend a weekend or a week with them exploring all that nature has to offer. These friendships are much deeper and tighter than any connections you make with folks by just going out to dinner or spending time with them at work.”

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